

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6808

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SUBJ: AUSTRIAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS ON OCTOBER 5

REF: VIENNA 7848

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: AUSTRIAN VOTERS GO TO POLLS  
ON OCTOBER 5 AFTER LONGEST, MOST EXPENSIVE AND PROBABLY  
DULLEST ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN POST-WAR PERIOD. THREE  
PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT HAVE CONTESTED CAMPAIGN LARGELY  
ON ECONOMIC THEMES, PARTICULARLY JOB SECURITY, AND ON  
PERSONALITIES OF TOP LEADERS. IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES  
HAVE BEEN MINIMAL AND NEW IDEAS EMBARRASSINGLY FEW.  
PROBABLE ELECTION LOSS BY SOCIALISTS (SPO) OF THEIR  
TWO-SEAT ABSOLUTE MAJORITY HAS MOVED OPPOSITION PARTIES  
TO AVOID TURBULENT CONTEST FOR FEAR OF ANTAGONIZING  
SOCIALISTS AS POSSIBLE SENIOR COALITION PARTNER. ONLY  
MINOR SHIFTS IN VOTING PATTERNS ARE ANTICIPATED -  
MINOR GAINS FOR PEOPLE'S PARTY (OVP), LIMITED LOSSES  
FOR SPO AND MINIMAL CHANGE IN FREEDOM PARTY (FPO)  
VOTE. ACCORDINGLY, SPO SHOULD WIN COMFORTABLE PLURALITY  
OF SEATS. SUCH OUTCOME SUGGESTS NEXT GOVERNMENT WILL  
BE SOCIALIST-LED COALITION, MOST LIKELY WITH SMALL  
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FREEDOM PARTY. END SUMMARY.

2. CONFLICTING APPEALS AND PROMISES TO VOTERS ON JOB SECURITY AND FUTURE PERFORMANCE OF ECONOMY HAVE MARKED FINAL THREE WEEKS OF AUSTRIAN NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEFORE OCTOBER 5 VOTING. GOVERNING SOCIALISTS HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN PROJECTING THEMSELVES AS BEST GUARANTOR OF CONTINUED HIGH EMPLOYMENT BY STRESSING JOB SECURITY AS NUMBER ONE CONCERN OF GOVERNMENT, EVEN AS TRADE OFF TO INCREASED PUBLIC DEBT AND MORE INFLATION. OPPOSITION OVP, CAST IN ROLE OF ECONOMIC CASSANDRA, HAS BELABORED, WITH ONLY LIMITED IMPACT AMONG VOTERS, SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT FOR ALLEGED MISMANAGEMENT OF ECONOMY, ACCUMULATION OF PUBLIC DEBT AND PROMOTION OF FALSE EUPHORIA REGARDING ECONOMY'S PROBABLE FUTURE PERFORMANCE.

3. OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE EXCLUDED FROM CONTENTION FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICIES, PROBABLY WISELY SO, GIVEN KREISKY'S OVERWHELMING ADVANTAGES IN THESE AREAS. SOMEWHAT BAFFLING, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN LIMITED ATTENTION BY OPPOSITION PARTIES TO SUCH ISSUES AS MEDIA REFORM, CRIMINAL CODE REFORM WITH INCLUSION OF ABORTION-ON-DEMAND, AND UNIVERSITY REORGANIZATION, ALL ISSUES BITTERLY CONTESTED IN PARLIAMENT LAST YEAR. PART OF EXPLANATION FOR SUCH RETICENCE LIES IN BACKGROUND OF RECENTLY ELECTED TOP OVP TAUS-BUSEK TEAM WHO, WHILE EXPERTS ON ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT, ARE NOT YET WELL VERSED IN PARTY'S PHILOSOPHY ON SOCIAL ENGINEERING. OTHER BASIC CONSIDERATION FOR HESITANCE IS EXPECTATION OF BOTH OPPOSITION PARTIES THAT ONE OR OTHER WILL, GIVEN LIKELY OUTCOME OF ELECTIONS, BECOME COALITION PARTY WITH SOCIALIST.

4. RESULT OF FOREGOING TACTICAL SITUATION HAS THEREFORE BEEN: 1) CONTEST OF PERSONALITIES IN WHICH KREISKY IS CLEARLY MOST ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATE, AND 2) CONFRONTATION OVER WHICH PARTY BEST ENSURES JOB SECURITY, DOMAIN IN WHICH SOCIALISTS HAVE BETTER PERFORMANCE RECORD. OVP APPEAL FOR VOTER SUPPORT ON BASIS OF PROMISE TO FORM CONCENTRATION GOVERNMENT OR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OVP-SPO COALITION, IF GIVEN MANDATE BY VOTERS, HAS STRUCK SYMPATHETIC CORD AMONG AUSTRIANS BUT NOT TO DEGREE NECESSARY TO OVERCOME EXISTING POPULARITY GAP BETWEEN OVP AND LEADING SOCIALISTS.

5. FOREGOING SITUATION, COUPLED WITH ABSENCE OF MAJOR IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES AMONG PARTIES, SEEMS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR REPORTED UNUSUALLY LARGE PERCENTAGE

OF VOTERS (UP TO 20 PERCENT) WHO WERE UNDECIDED ON PARTY PREFERENCES ONE WEEK BEFORE ELECTIONS.

6. PROBABLE ELECTION OUTCOME: DEVELOPMENTS IN FINAL THREE WEEKS OF ELECTION CAMPAIGN SUGGEST THAT SOCIALIST PROSPECTS HAVE IMPROVED SLIGHTLY SINCE EMBASSY'S LAST ANALYSIS OF CAMPAIGN (REFTEL) AND THAT KREISKY TEAM SHOULD EASILY WIN COMFORTABLE PLURALITY OF SEATS. SOCIALISTS MAY EVEN COME WITHIN ONE OR TWO SEATS OF WINNING ABSOLUTE MAJORITY. CONVERSELY, OVP PROSPECTS SEEM TO HAVE SAGGED SOMEWHAT, SUGGESTING A SMALLER GAIN OF TWO TO THREE SEATS. OUTLOOK FOR FPO REMAINS ONE OF MINIMAL GAINS OR LOSSES. FOREGOING FORECAST, EXPRESSED IN TERMS OF SEATS IN NEXT PARLIAMENT, WOULD BE: SPO: 89-91 (NOW 93); OVP: 82-84 (80); AND FPO: 9-11 (10).

7. FOREGOING PROJECTED SEAT DISTRIBUTION WOULD PRECLUDE KREISKY FROM RE-ESTABLISHING SINGLE PARTY SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT AND REQUIRE, AT LEAST INITIALLY, AN ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH COALITION GOVERNMENT. MOST INDICATORS SUGGEST THAT IN SUCH SITUATION, KREISKY WILL MANEUVER, FOR OBVIOUS POLITICAL AND PERSONAL REASONS, TO ESTABLISH SPO-FPO COALITION. SHOULD SOCIALIST LOSSES BE GREATER THAN NOW EXPECTED, OTHER GOVERNMENTAL COMBINATIONS WOULD BECOME POSSIBLE, RANGING FROM MORE PROBABLE LARGE SPO-OVP COALITION TO LESS PROBABLE SMALL OVP-FPO COALITION WITH SOCIALISTS IN OPPOSITION. BUCHANAN

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